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SUBJECT: EMBASSY HOSTS HUMAN RIGHTS IN-REACH ON FEMALE GENITAL
MUTILATION

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On June 26, the Embassy held the first of a series of planned Human Rights In-Reaches intended to educate American and locally employed staff (LES) about critical human rights issues in Guinea. This first program focused on combating Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a practice that affects an estimated 96% of the female population in Guinea. A pre-program survey was distributed to Embassy participants prior to the event in order to gather a baseline of understanding of employee attitudes towards human rights in Guinea and FGM. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) Most Embassy efforts on human rights consist of out-reach to government and non-government actors throughout Guinea. In discussing human rights with our own staff, however, we realized that many of our own employees do not have a solid understanding of human rights issues, nor of why the USG advocates so strongly for better protection of those rights. In order to address this problem, we decided to reach out to our own staff in order to raise awareness on critical human rights issues in Guinea. Support for and understanding of fundamental human rights must start at home with both American and local staff. For the message to have maximum impact, we are utilizing local speakers and local NGOs to deliver the programs.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

¶3. (U) For the first Human Rights In-Reach on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Embassy invited Dr. Morrissanda Kouyate, Operations Director of Inter-African Committee and former director of CPTAFE, an organization that has received funding from USAID Guinea to combat FGM. Dr. Kouyate's presentation focused on: 1) graphic depictions of the different types of FGM; 2) discussion of the health consequences of FGM; 3) debunking the social, religious, and cultural rationale for FGM; and 4) discussion of the prevalence of FGM in Guinea. Embassy included three local staff, who are passionately opposed to FGM, in the program preparations. Local staff also participated as presenters in the event, introducing the speaker and reading a passage accounting a Guinean woman's own excision.

¶4. (SBU) A survey was distributed at the beginning of the program to all participants, including Americans and LES, to gather a baseline understanding of and attitude towards human rights and Female Genital Mutilation. A total of 230 surveys were completed, 41 from women and 188 from men. Of the total surveys, 28 were completed by American staff and 202 by LES. When asked to comment on whether various human rights issues were a problem in Guinea, the top five human rights concerns amongst participants were 1) Female Genital Mutilation, 2) Forced Early Marriage of Girls, 3) Illegal Prison Detentions, 4) Rape and Sexual Violence, and 5) Torture in Detention Centers. Furthermore, 81% of participants said that the Guinean Government did not protect human rights and 75% did not think the

people of Guinean understood human rights.

¶15. (SBU) Participants were then questioned on their knowledge of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). When asked about the rate of FGM in Guinea, 61% of participants knew the rate was "More than 75%." The rate of FGM was estimated at 96% in Guinea according to a 2005 survey. Only 50% of the participants knew that FGM is illegal in Guinea. When LES women were asked whether they thought FGM would have an impact on one's chances of getting married, 33% said it would increase one's prospects, 26% said it would decrease one's prospects, and 41% said it would have no impact. Participants were also asked how many people they knew that were impacted by this practice, 21% said zero to five people, 20% said between five and 20 people, and 59% said more than 20 people.

REACTIONS

¶16. (SBU) Dr. Kouyate led discussions asking Embassy staff about their reaction to his presentation and thoughts on how to combat FGM in Guinea. During this time, American and local staff shared personal stories, expressed their shock at the new information, and acknowledged their previous lack of understanding of FGM. At the beginning of the presentation, Dr. Kouyate had asked the audience how many people had sent their daughters to be excised. Around 40% of the local staff raised their hands openly. At the end of the presentation, many who had admitted to have their daughters participate in this practice claimed "they had no idea of what had actually happened. It was women's business." Many local staff offered ideas of how to combat the practice, saying emphatically that this presentation needs to be given to their families and to people in their villages to educate them on FGM. After the event, Embassy received overwhelmingly positive reactions from Americans and local staff.

¶17. (SBU) A female staff member stood up during the discussion and emotionally related how she had chosen to be ostracized from her family for eight years in order to protect her two daughters from FGM. A number of men publicly thanked the Embassy for the presentation, saying that they never knew what FGM actually involved, and they appreciated the opportunity to speak frankly about it. These same comments were later echoed to supervisors throughout the building. One clearly appalled staff member told his supervisor after the presentation that he has three daughters of his own, and he is absolutely committed to ensuring that they do not become victims of FGM.

COMMENT

¶18. (SBU) Many local staff were obviously emotionally moved by the presentation. Both men and women participants occasionally left the room for a few minutes, clearly shocked, and at times uncomfortable with the presentation, which is the same type of presentation made out in the villages with USAID support. It was clear that the in-reach succeeded in reaching a number of local staff who expressed genuine concern and disgust for FGM, many of them being the same individuals who had raised their hands when asked if their daughters had been excised. Although some attitudes were significantly changed, other LES likely remain committed to the practice for cultural and religious reasons. This in-reach is an important initial step in educating our staff about our work on human rights. Embassy hopes that as these in-reaches continue over the coming months, covering such topics as forced early marriages, HIV/AIDS discrimination, domestic violence, etc, our own staff will demonstrate increased understanding and advocacy for better protection of fundamental human rights in Guinea. To be effective outside the building, we must start at home. END COMMENT.

CARTER